DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 059 502 CG 006 820

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TITLE Cribs or Careers? Professionally Employed Married Women's Attitudes toward Motherhood.
INSTITUTION Akron Univ., Ohio.
PUB DATE 71
NOTE 20p.; Paper presented at American Sociological Association Annual Meeting (66th, Denver, Colo., August 30 - September 2, 1971)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS *Attitudes; *Females; *Mother Attitudes; *Parent Role; Role Perception; *Working Women

ABSTRACT

Writers concerned with the topic of overpopulation have suggested that providing women with more challenging occupational careers will help to reduce the birth rate. Such a contention was not supported by this study of 53 families in which the mother is a practicing physician, attorney, or college professor. While 8 of the couples were childless, 4 of them were involuntarily so and the remaining 4 were newly-married. Of the 45 couples with children, the mean family size was 2.4. Ten of the couples with children had plans to have more. Seven couples had 4 or more children. Two women indicated limiting family size because of their career commitments: both reportedly regretted having done so. All 53 professional women rated their roles as mothers as being more important to them than their career roles. None of them expressed resentment over limiting their career activities due to family responsibilities. Suggestions are made for changes in the social structure which could lead to high levels of child-related emotional satisfactions for parents without encouraging them to have large families of their own. (Author)

ED 059502

CRIBS OR CAREERS?
PROFESSIONALLY EMPLOYED MARRIED WOMEN'S ATTITUDES TOWARD MOTHERHOOD

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Presented at the 66th Annual Meeting
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American Sociological Association
August 30-September 2, 1971
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The doubling of the U.S. population within the last fifty years has led to some alarm about our present rate of fertility. With the coming of the post-war baby-boom, the pessimistic cries uttered by demographers about a dwindling American population (due to low birth rates in the 30's) became a thing of the past. Instead the focus rested upon the continents of Asia, Africa, and South America, reflecting the belief that the population problem was not our baby. Recent concern about the state of our environment, however, has been made inseparable from the population problem in many circles, and Americans too are being made aware that the underdeveloped nations are not the only inhabitants of this planet who have given birth to a population explosion!

Observations that we must move beyond family planning in solving the problem have led to numerous suggestions, including use of an involuntary fertility control agent (such as drugs in the water supply), intensified educational programs, tax incentives, and institutional changes (Berelson: 1969). One such social and institutional change that is frequently being cited as a panacea for the population problem is the granting of equal employment opportunities to women. This position,

which has been taken in numerous popular magazines and journals,[1] bears strong resemblance to the unrealistic suffragette claims made at the turn of the century.

This mode of thought is not limited to popular magazines nor to the writings of militant feminists, but may be observed within the scientific community as well. In testifying before a House Subcommittee on Resources and Conservation in September, 1969, demographer Judith Black stated:

> We offer women few viable options to fulltime careers as wives and mothers, except jobs that are, on the average of low status and low pay. In effect, we force a massive investment of human resources into the reproductive sphere--far more than we need to invest. (Population Bulletin: 1969)

Perhaps even more striking was the three-day workshop held in New York City on the "Impact of Fertility Limitation on Women's Life Career and Personality" in February, 1970. Reportedly many women at the meeting expressed agreement that increased opportunities for women would be a potent force in controlling the birth rate (Science: 1970).

This same argument was presented most pointedly by Miles (1970) when he questioned "Whose Baby Is the Population Problem?"

> The status of women in a post industrial society is, without doubt, one of the key determinants of the birth rate. The more satisfying the employment opportunities which women have, the less likely they are to want large families. Women who lack the satisfactions which come from decent employment. . .must find self-fulfillment somehow, somewhere. If, in addition to lacking employment, women lack membership in any social group with which they have rapport, they are strongly impelled to create a social group of their own by producing babies.

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[1]The importance of women's rights in solving the population problem has been hinted at in Rober's ecological report "The Better Earth," (New York Times Magazine: March, 1970), in Margaret Mead's article, "Women: A Time for Change," (Redbook: March, 1970), in Newsweek's feature "Women's Lib: The War on 'Sexism'" (March, 1970), in a Playboy interview with Dr. Paul Ehrlich (August, 1970) and was offered as an already accomplished solution in Wattenberg's critical article "The Nonsense Explosion" (The New Republic: April, 1970).

> Greatly enlarged employment opportunities for women may be one of the most important factors in reducing average family size. There is much evidence to indicate that most women of childbearing age prefer employment at reasonably decent jobs to being full-time homemakers. If our society genuinely desires to lower its birth rate, it must find more satisfying and better paid opportunities for women, particularly those of childbearing age. (Italics added)

It is the position of the authors of this paper that such statements, while they are made with confidence and appear to be a logical outcome of improving the status of women, remain to be supported with empirical evidence. There is no evidence, to our knowledge, which demonstrates that improving employment opportunities for women (although in itself a most desirable goal) will automatically have any significant impact on the population problem.[2] As Sweet (1970:208) has recently noted, "Students of fertility tend to believe that correlations observed between various fertility measures...and employment patterns result from decisions to work rather than have children. An equally compelling case can be made, however, for the reverse causal sequence: that women who have smaller families, for whatever reason, have more time to work and fewer constraints on work." This paper is an attempt to argue in behalf of "the reverse causal sequence."

Feminists at the turn of the century held the belief that enfranchising the "fair sex" would cure the world's ills, but enfranchisement was disillusioningly followed by a depression, another World War, and a

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[2]Existing evidence suggests an inverse relationship between the fertility rate and a woman's professional activity. (For example, see Power's et. al. study of married female physicians.) Our data leads us to caution in interpreting the relationship between fertility and employment productivity. While our study of 53 married couples of which the wife was a physician, attorney, or college professor may suggest certain relationships, a much larger sample is required to adequately test our assertions.

For a review of the literature on fertility and a wife's employment outside the home, see Sweet (1968).

myriad of other domestic and foreign problems which the "gentle sex" could do nothing to alter. Similarly, granting women equal rights (without mass education programs on the ills of having more than two children, easy access to contraceptives and legalized abortions, as well as economic sanctions) will not ipso facto curb the population growth. Providing women with interesting occupations will not by itself insure that they will desire fewer children. The attitude toward the desirability of a third, fourth or fifth child and perhaps the "sacredness" of motherhood itself must be altered. In our present culture, motherhood remains at the height of feminine accomplishment, continues to be much coveted, and carries its own emotional rewards; it is not likely to be relinquished for the ulcers and cardiac conditions frequently correlated with a man's career.

Our position stems from data gathered in a recent study which we conducted on the dual profession family.[3] The authors interviewed 53 families in which the wife was either a practicing attorney, a physician, or a university professor -- positions carrying both high status and numerous occupational rewards. Despite the reportedly satisfying employment of these women, almost without exception, they placed motherhood above career aspirations. It must be emphasized that these women were all living with their spouses at the time of the interview. We make no claims that their responses and attitudes are characteristic of either single women or of divorcees. While these married professional women were all practicing in highly stimulating professions and with few

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[3]A complete analysis of the data will appear in Margaret M. Poloma and T. Neal Garland, The Married Professionals: A Study of High Status Dual Profession Couples. (Stanford University Press; forthcoming)

exceptions were highly satisfied, in almost all cases, marriage and family clearly constituted the woman's salient role. In a very real sense, the traditional role of wife and mother was reinforced and supported by the woman's professional involvement.

Although we did not control for the number of children in the family, only eight couples out of fifty-three had no children at the time of the interview. Of these eight, one was expecting their first child and two were newly married couples still in the planning stages of having children. Four couples were involuntarily childless. Only the remaining couple had decided against having children; and although the career was not the reason for not having children, it undoubtedly kept the woman resolute about not desiring a family. For those 45 couples with children, the mean number was 2.4 Ten of these couples, however, expressed both the desire and plans for having more children. This strongly suggests that families in which a wife is employed on a highly professional level and in a position that she reportedly enjoys does not, by itself, cause her family size to be smaller than the larger population. With her high level of training, the typical respondent in our study found little difficulty in combining her career with family life. Her adequate salary made child care a problem that could be more readily solved than for the family of a woman employed in a lesser capacity. (Almost all of the women with children under 16 years of age had full-time domestic help.) Nor did an intensive career-orientation (complete with a desire for professional renown) hinder a woman from having a large family. Two of our three women with five children were highly successful and very career oriented. In an attempt to demonstrate our thesis that high status employment of women is not causally related to

limiting family size, we will look at our respondents reports regarding why they had children, the perceived salience of the mother role, and the reported interplay between the career and mother role set.

Reasons Expressed for Having Children

Upon beginning the study, the researchers fully expected dual-profession couples to limit themselves to small families (i.e., one or two children), if indeed they had children at all. We too had assumed a causal relationship with participation in high status professions leading to a small family size. We did not expect to find a model number of three children, nor did we expect couples to have four and five children. Yet seven of the couples had either four or five children, and several other not-yet-completed families desired this number. With the exception of one respondent who was working only because the money was needed, all others reported a high degree of satisfaction with their professions. The women tailored their careers to mesh with family demands and ranged anywhere from slightly to greatly involved in their professional work. Among the "slightly involved" were women who worked less than 30 hours per week, and who frequently referred to the secondary nature of their professional involvement. Many of the "moderately involved" entered their professions only after their children were in school full time or after the children were launched completely from the home. Usually these women worked full-time, but were reportedly not interested in aspiring toward extrinsic professional rewards such as promotions or recognition by the profession. One professor who had a successful career prior to her marriage, who interrupted her career for thirteen years to raise a family of four children, and who has only recently returned to her profession on a limited scale, provided one example of moderate involve-

ment. Also found were "career-oriented" women who wanted both the intrinsic satisfactions of professional involvement and the extrinsic rewards of recognition and promotions in return for heavy involvement in professional work. While the latter group were a distinct minority within our sample, no correlation was found between family size and degree of career orientation.

Having children seems to be a taken-for-granted goal in our (and perhaps every) society. Most of our otherwise very articulate respondents were momentarily tongue-tied or silenced by the question: "Why did you have children?" Marriage for our respondents meant having children, and having children meant having more than one, if possible. Only two respondents felt that the career was related to their having one child--and both expressed regret over a lack of siblings for that child. For the most part, family size was reportedly not perceived to be related to career aspirations. An unusually successful attorney and mother of five mentioned that she might still have more children -- if she is unable to have more of her own, she and her husband have plans to adopt. Another respondent who presently has three children indicated that she would like at least two more. She commented:

> I don't know if there is anything that brings the depth of satisfaction that children bring. They certainly are a cost to my career, and in addition, they can be very frustrating and difficult. Yet we just wouldn't have it any other way. I don't think that I could ever get from the career the satisfaction I get from the children.

A young psychiatrist just finishing residency and expecting her first child at the time of the interview asserted that she wants a large family (perhaps five children) even though this will definitely curtail her career. A brilliant physician (who graduated at the top of her class from

a highly-respected medical school) limited her career involvement the entire time her three children were growing up. She expressed her desire for motherhood in the following way:

> To me it's a normal instinct to want to have children. There is a certain sense of personal fulfillment in having children that a career cannot give. In having children you are leaving something to perpetuate your existence...

The most common answer received about the reason for having children revolved around the incompleteness of life without them. While thirteen of our couples had only one child, nearly half of these couples were not completed families, with most of the remainder asserting that they had wanted more children but were unable to have them.

One young lawyer adopted two children because of her inability to have children of her own. To please the placement agency she discontinued work completely for over a year. Her response as to why they wanted children was as follows:

> We feel very much that children are an important goal in marriage. It is like working for someone and accomplishing something for them. For example, I couldn't imagine what a vacation would be like without the boys. The same thing with the home. What's the use of a nice home without them?

Psychologist Bruno Bettelheim has noted that "much as women want to be good scientists or engineers, they want first and foremost to be womanly companions of men and to be mothers." A nationally-known female physician (and mother of one child) seemed to be in agreement with him when she stated during her interview for our study:

> I envy people who have large families. I think that G.J. (another female physician) is very fortunate because she did marry younger and have a large family. She doesn't take her work as seriously and she doesn't work as hard--I mean she isn't working day and night the way I do. I am the type of person who can't do things part and part. I think I would rather get married at age 21, have a big family, and not try to do both.

Another young physician (who is working for a planned parenthood organization) was expecting her second child at the time of the interview. (She was the only one in the sample who referred to a population problem in the U.S.)

> I would like to have a dozen children if I could. My husband feels very strongly about the population problem being the major problem of the world today. And he is probably right--about anybody but us. The main thing that bothered me in the past when I thought I was not going to get married was the idea that I couldn't have children. I've always been child-oriented.

Almost without exception, women in our sample wanted children--and wanted more than one. The argument that the involvement of women in meaningful occupations will cause a limitation in family size is weakened by data secured in our study. While seven couples did have completed families with one child, four of these mothers entered their careers only after the child was in junior high school. With the exception of two couples, the remaining five asserted that the career was not related to the size of the family. Six other couples with one and two children at the time of the interview were on their way to having three and possibly four or more children. One respondent commented: "I am a natural-born mother. Having children fulfilled my nature. This was more important to me than a career."

Salience of the Mother Role

The expressed attitudes regarding motherhood were strongly positive. It might even be suggested that these women who were in professions sex-typed as male used motherhood to demonstrate their femininity. (A few younger respondents actually asserted that they felt more feminine after marriage and motherhood.) Rather than causing a woman to limit

her family size to one or two children, involvement in law, medicine or academia may have led her to have at least as large a family as her neighbor.

One of the things that came to the attention of the interviewers early during the study was the women's eagerness to discuss their children. While husbands delighted in explaining their careers in great detail, they were able to say relatively little about their children. Wives, on the other hand, were willing and able to answer questions regarding the children in far greater detail--and, for the most part, with greater enthusiasm than those questions pertaining to their work. This belief in the importance of the mother role was further demonstrated by the fact that many women refused to work at all during the children's pre-school years. While 27 of the 45 mothers in our sample worked prior to the children's entering first grade, 20 of them limited their employment to part-time positions. Of the 37 mothers who worked while the children were in elementary school, 14 of them acknowledged making a point of taking only those positions which allowed them to be home when their children returned from school.

These women made any necessary adjustments to insure that the priority of the wife and mother role was not jeopardized. This included complete stoppage of professional activities for a period of time, part-time employment during the children's formative years, or curtailing some demands (such as traveling or evening work) of full-time positions. "My emotional commitment is first to being a wife and mother; the career is quite secondary," was an idea expressed over and over again in differing ways by the majority of the respondents.

Four respondents had not committed themselves firmly to the salience of the mother role. In only one of these cases could an ambivalence toward a very successful career be detected because of a feeling that motherhood should be more desired than a career, with the other three women compartmentalizing their dual roles without acknowledging the greater salience of either. Another three women expressed serious conflict between the mother and career roles; but in all three cases, the professional involvement was somewhat involuntary. In these latter cases the income of the wife was needed for the family's solidly middle-class life, although the women themselves preferred to minimize professional involvement in order to spend more time with their children. A young lawyer was most concerned and troubled.

> The income has been essential, but I think there has been some cost in terms of our children (because of the wife's working). I think they have suffered by not having a mother who is with them full time -- and I do regret that. My own feeling is that both of my children are insecure. . .I feel a big area of guilt because working must be the reason for their insecurity.

Women who were in a position to do so stopped working or decreased their professional involvement when their guilt feelings became overpowering. One mother of four children stopped working a week before the interview because she felt she needed more time with the children. Another mother of three was considering not working the following year for the same reason. Although both of the husbands were somewhat disappointed in their wives' wishes to limit themselves temporarily to the mother role, the women themselves felt that, at this stage of their lives, being a mother was more important than having career success. If there were any feelings of hostility due to career limitations imposed

by the children, our one-time, open-ended interviews with husband and wife (separately and simultaneously) were not able to tap such feelings from the wife, nor did any husbands report hostility on the part of their wives.

Interplay of Career and Mother Roles

With the clear saliency of motherhood in the role set of these high status professional women, the assertion that providing women with "more satisfying and better paid opportunities" will solve the population problem loses some of its credibility. Yet in spite of the saliency of the mother role, there was an interrelationship perceived between the mother and the work roles. With few exceptions, the women expressed their belief that working made them better mothers. A young physician expressed it in the following manner:

> I may be rationalizing, but I feel that if I were home all day, the children would have a worse upbringing then with me just home in the evenings. I enjoy being with them and most of the time we spend together is quite pleasant. I never have the feeling that I am going out of my mind. I do notice, however, that when I am home on weekends from Saturday noon through Sunday, by Monday I am glad to get back to work. I don't have a lot of patience.

Another young mother (an attorney) noted that both home roles and professional roles were essential to complete her as a person:

> I am not really effective at one without the other. If I were just a housewife, I don't think I could be content. But I do know that since I got married and had the children, I got settled professionally. One complements the other.

While working is perceived by the mother to have a positive effect on the family, there are situations in which feelings of ambivalence arise. One mother reported that when her three-year old asks, "Mommy,

why do you have to go to work?" she feels "awful." (This mother is presently a full-time physician in residency, but once this phase of training is over, she plans to reduce her professional involvement to half time.) Another well-established female physician and mother of three stated:

> I suppose at times I feel I really ought to be at home. Occasionally I think I ought to spend a little more time with the children. I think any woman -- especially when she gets a little blue about something -- will start to feel this way. But this feeling is only occasional.

Past myths about the detrimental effects of a mother's employment on the child appear to take hold whenever problems occur. Having eneuretic children, a child with emotional problems, or a child who comes to the attention of his teacher for his unusual behavior (all examples encountered during this study) produced guilt feelings in the mother. A career woman who had successfully raised a son to young adulthood made the following poignant observation:

> The stereotype of the guilty-feeling working mother is one that dies hard. There is always the concern that the child of the working mother is going to be damaged. So I suppose I have carried my burdens of guilt. This was true until about now. We have been very proud of what my son has done and what he has accomplished. But it took a long time to work it out.

When this mother was asked how she handled the guilt feelings when they occurred, she responded, "Simply by restricting the amount of outside activities and by minimizing the things that would take me out of the home." For her, as for most of our respondents, this was part of motherhood -- and a small price for what she considered a most rewarding experience.

Summary and Conclusion

The recent growth of interest in the problems of ecology, conservation and the environment have been firmly wed to the issue of overpopulation. For those who feel that technology can keep up with an infinitely growing population, this paper will have little interest. But if the reader feels a decline in the population growth and in the population size itself is essential (views expressed by Kingsley Davis and Paul Ehrlich, among other scientists), then the phenomenon suggested in this paper that career involvement will not ipso facto lead to smaller families will be of some note.

There is no question that women must be given equal opportunities for career and career commitment in American society. But as we have attempted to demonstrate, even very highly trained professional women who have earned outstanding positions are not apt to limit their desire for children. Clearly these couples (even the childless ones) wanted children and wanted more than one. (As we have already indicated, both women who had one child due to the pressures of career involvement during the childbearing years regretted this occurrence. They both felt it would have been easier on the child if he had had siblings.) Then what can be done to encourage women to have fewer children?

Economic sanctions alone would not probably be sufficient motivation to reduce family size among upper class and upper middle class couples. Worse yet, it might serve to make the third, fourth or fifth child a status symbol, not unlike the new car every year or the summer cottage. Senator Packard of Oregon's well-publicized suggestion that income tax deductions be allowed only on the first three children (while definitely a step in

the right direction) was not stringent enough to do much except penalize the poor. And keep in mind that supposedly it is not the poor who are contributing the greatest numbers to the growing population; rather it is the middle class American who is having the number of children he wants. Furthermore, as Wayne David (1970) has noted, it is the affluent who proportionately contribute most to the destruction of the environment.

Two things are definitely needed: First we must have a mass education program (in both schools and the mass media) to make couples of childbearing age aware of the humanistic problems of having more than two children. Secondly, contraceptives must be made easily available to anyone who wishes them and abortion must be legalized to insure an end to unwanted pregnancies. While economic sanctions may supplement the program, probably they should not be at its heart. The main emphasis should rest on changing value systems to make it unamerican and detrimental to one's already born children to have a third, and especially a fourth child, and then to make the means readily available to have only the desired number of children.

But this quite possibly will still not solve the problems of the "natural born mother" who loves children, and, who like a number of women in our sample, would not find career fulfillment an adequate substitute. These "feminine instincts" (whether due to biology, socialization, or a combination of both) are a reality and should be redirected rather than denied. A mother of four responded in a fashion typical of our respondents when she said, "If I had to choose between my children and my career, I would choose my children."

Frequently a career does not allow a woman to channel sympathy and warmth into her work -- this is a special reward that, according to our

respondents with children, comes from their family life. Perhaps the one way to solve the problem is to begin a campaign to reduce the grip that natural parents have on their children. Presently the parent-child bond is so sacred that regardless of the incompetence of the parents, rarely is this bond broken. (Yet social workers and clinical psychologists can easily testify to the impossibility of working with a disturbed child when he is left in his disruptive family environment. Even the child who is repeatedly physically battered is more often than not left to the mercy of his parents, who reportedly were often battered children themselves.) There is nothing sacred about our increasingly more isolated nuclear family system -- a system which lacks the "backups" of the modified extended family of yesterday.

We are not advocating a return to the extended family, but rather that some thought be given to the Gemeinschaft of yesterday and the Gesellschaft of today in our movement toward community living of tomorrow. It appears to us that in our present social structure the family unit is overburdened in providing for the emotional satisfaction of family members--especially satisfaction for the parents. For example, over and over again we heard complaints, not about a lack of acquaintances and social functions to attend, but about the dirth of true friends. Frequently respondents were unable to name one person that they would consider a "close friend" -- or they would have to return to friends from high school and college days who lived hundreds or thousands of miles away and whom they saw once every couple of years. Emotional satisfaction in terms of a love relationship could only be found in the isolated nuclear family. Is it any wonder that couples decide to have four or five children?

Two things may help to alleviate this problem: 1) as in the Israeli kibbutz or as in Soviet society, children could be seen, not as personal chattel, but as the society's children with all of society's members taking responsibility for them; and 2) the social structure through which this is possible could be created. One possible answer might be through encouraging the creation of neighborhood communities where couples (both those with and those without children) might live with their respective families but come together for evening meals or recreation. This is perhaps one of the more realistic and workable plans to emerge from the movement toward communal living in the United States. Bronfenbrenner (1970) has noted the warmth with which Russian adults regard the children of others: could not this same atmosphere be established in American society? It is perhaps in the movement toward a communal society (which may lead to a drastic change in family form) that the population problem may find a solution and that women may truly achieve equality.

We do not assert that our respondents would have agreed with the suggestions briefly outlined here. They, for the most part, wanted to be natural parents in a traditional family structure. It is our belief, however, that it may be easier to redirect maternal desires than to deny they exist. It may be naive to believe that the majority of American women will accept the notion that they can be fulfilled by becoming like their husbands in terms of a career. (It is just as plausible that husbands may find great satisfaction in experiencing the viable options open to their wives.) While feminists may sincerely believe that women wish to be redeemed from the chains of husband and family, our respondents were not interested in their liberation. They felt "liberated"

through having the best of two worlds -- the satisfactions of family life and varying degrees of professional involvement. Most of our interviewees (even those young ones from ages 25 to 30) revealed no desire for any drastic changes. While the family system as we know it undoubtedly hinders a woman's career, these respondents wanted both their family and professional involvement, limiting the latter to meet the family's needs. According to the self-reports of our respondents, the profession did little, if anything, to contribute to a decrease in family size. It would be a serious mistake to assert that increasing opportunities for American women will automatically solve the population crisis facing our nation today.

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